

Message Text

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41

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
----- 034970

R 261534Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9510

INFO AMCONSULATE ALEXANDRIA

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 CAIRO 1005

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MOPS, EG, XF

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE EGYPTIAN REACTIONS IF ISRAEL INTERVENES IN LEBANON

1. SUMMARY. INITIAL SUCCESS OF SYRIAN TRIPARTITE MEDIATION EFFORT AND INSERTION OF PLA FORCES INTO LEBANON POSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR ISRAEL AND EGYPT. IF ISRAEL DECIDES IT CANNOT PERMIT LEBANON TO BECOME POSSIBLE CONFRONTATION STATE AND MUST INTERVENE AS PROTECTIVE MEASURE, CONSEQUENCES WOULD BE SERIOUS FOR ALL CONCERNED IN ME, PARTICULARLY EGYPT, NOT TO MENTION FUTURE OF US PEACE POLICY IN THE AREA. EGYPTIANS WOULD REACT VIOLENTLY TO SUCH INTERVENTION PUBLICLY. WHILE MILITARY REACTION ON THEIR PART AS RESULT OF ARAB PRESSURES AND EMOTIONS IS NOT BE EXCLUDED, EGYPTIAN LEADERS RECOGNIZE THEIR MILITARY OPTIONS ARE SHARPLY LIMITED. SIMILARLY, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC OPTIONS--OUTSIDE OF ENCOURAGING A NEW OIL EMBARGO--ARE VERY LIMITED. WE BELIEVE SADAT WOULD DIRECT URGENT APPEAL TO US TO STOP HOSTILITIES AND ENSURE IMMEDIATE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL, WHILE LAUNCHING VIGOROUS CAMPAIGN IN UNITED NATIONS, IN

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ORDER TO RESIST PRESSURE FOR EGYPTIAN MILITARY ACTION AND

PRESERVE US-EGYPTIAN RELATIONSHIP AND GAINS IT HAS MEANT FOR EGYPT. IF THE US UNABLE TO MEET MINIMUM EGYPTIAN EXPECTATIONS, EGYPT'S RELUCTANT PARTICIPATION IN HOSTILITIES AND AN END OF EGYPTIAN RELIANCE ON US, WITH ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR ME PEACE HOPES, MAY BE INEVITABLE. MUCH WOULD DEPEND ON PRESSURES FROM OTHER ARABS, PARTICULARLY SADAT'S KEY ALLY, SAUDI ARABIA. END SUMMARY.

2. LAST FEW DAYS' DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON--INCLUDING ENTRY OF SYRIAN-SPONSORED PLA FORCES, TRIPARTITE (LEBANESE-SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN) ARRANGED CEASE-FIRE, THE POSSIBLE DEPLOYMENT OF SOME SYRIAN MILITARY TO PARTICIPATE IN CEASE-FIRE OBSERVATION TEAMS, THE PATENT WEAKENING OF THE LEBANESE ARMY AND THE STRENGTHENING OF THE PALESTINIAN INFLUENCE IN LEBANON--UNQUESTIONABLY POSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR ISRAEL AND EGYPT. FOR ISRAEL, IT MUST RAISE THE SPECTER OF LEBANON BECOMING ANOTHER CONFRONTATION STATE AND THE POSSIBLE NEED TO INTERVENE IN LEBANON OR SYRIA IN SOME FASHION TO PREVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING. FOR EGYPT, IT IS AN UNDESIRABLE SYRIAN SUCCESS AND RAISES THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH ISRAEL INTERVENTION. WHILE ALMOST ANYTHING THAT WOULD GIVE SYRIA HER COMEUPPANCE WOULD NOT DISPLEASE EGYPTIAN LEADERSHIP, ISRAELI INTERVENTION WOULD CONFRONT GOE WITH DIFFICULT DILEMMA. WE HAVE SOUGHT BELOW TO ANALYZE PROBABLE EGYPTIAN REACTION.

3. EGYPTIAN LEADERS WILL CONDEMN ISRAEL'S ACTION PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY. THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO ENGAGE IN FLURRY OF DIPLOMATIC AND OTHER ACTIVITY, INCLUDING MILITARY PREPARATIONS, TO DEMONSTRATE THAT EGYPT CANNOT AND WILL NOT ACCEPT SUCH INTERVENTION. HOWEVER, CURRENT EGYPTIAN LEADERS ARE REALISTIC ENOUGH TO KNOW THEIR OPTIONS ARE VERY LIMITED UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS. INDEED, THEIR INABILITY TO INFLUENCE LEBANESE EVENTS OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS HAS CAUSED CONSIDERABLE FRUSTRATION AND DISSATISFACTION WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP.

4. THE MILITARY OPTION. IN EMBASSY'S VIEW, LOGIC DICTATES THAT EGYPT HAS NO MILITARY OPTION TO EXERCISE IN EVENT OF ISRAELI INTERVENTION, AND THIS FACT IS RECOGNIZED BY TOP CIVILIAN AND MILITARY LEADERS. THE POLICY OF THE SOVIETS NOT TO MAKE UP THE OCTOBER WAR LOSSES OR TO PROVIDE AN ADEQUATE

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SUPPLY OF SPARE PARTS AND AMMUNITION, IF CONTINUED WOULD RESULT IN A FURTHER STEADY DEGRADATION OF THE MILITARY'S CAPABILITY, PARTICULARLY VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL'S ENHANCED CAPABILITY. RECENT MILITARY PURCHASES FROM NON-COMMUNIST SOURCES HAVE NOT BEEN SUFFICIENT TO ALLEVIATE THIS DEGRADATION. FURTHERMORE, EGYPT'S CAPABILITY TO TRANSPORT A MILITARY FORCE BY SEA OR AIR TO LEBANON, IN FACE OF POSSIBLE ISRAELI INTERDICTION EFFORTS, IS CONSIDERED MINIMAL, IF NOT SUICIDAL. ON THE OTHER HAND, DEPENDING UPON

THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE SITUATION AND THE LEVEL OF ARAB EMOTIONAL REACTION WHICH MAY DEVELOP, EGYPTIAN MILITARY ACTION IN THE SINAI, EVEN THOUGH ILLOGICAL, SHOULD NOT BE RULED OUT, REGARDLESS OF THE STATUS OF EGYPTIAN FORCES. NEVERTHELESS, WE WOULD EXPECT SADAT TO TRY TO RESIST THIS AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.

5. GIVEN THE CURRENT BITTER POLITICAL RIVALRY BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA, EVEN IF THE ARMED FORCES WERE IN A STATE OF READINESS, WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT SADAT WOULD NOT BE ANXIOUS TO GO TO THE AID OF SYRIAN FORCES AT THE RISK OF THE DEFEAT OF WHATEVER FORCE EGYPT WERE TO SEND TO LEBANON OR OF THE INITIATION OF OPERATIONS IN THE SINAI WITH RESULTANT THREAT OF LOSS OF EGYPTIAN GAINS THERE (PASSES, OIL FIELDS AND OPENING OF THE

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
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AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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SUEZ). THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE LITTLE ENTHUSIASM FOR ATTEMPTING TO ASSIST ASAD IN PREVENTING AN ISRAELI STRIKE AT SYRIAN ARMY IN VIEW OF WHAT EGYPTIAN LEADERS PERCEIVE AS SYRIA'S INTRANSIGENT AND EMOTIONAL OPPOSITION TO SINAI II AND SYRIA'S EXPLOITATION OF ITS SPECIAL ROLE IN LEBANON TO ENHANCE ITS OWN PRESTIGE AND INFLUENCE OVER PAST SIX MONTHS RATHER THAN RESOLVE LEBANESE CRISIS. (SYRIAN SUCCESS IN NEOGITATING

JANUARY 22 TRIPARTITE AGREEMENT AND CEASEFIRE APPEAR TO HAVE HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON THIS EGYPTIAN PERCEPTION.) SYRIAN DIRECTED MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LEBANON, IF IT WERE TO CONTINUE AND RESULT IN ISRAELI INTERVENTION, WILL IN EGYPTIAN VIEW BE SEEN AS CULMINATION OF THIS POLICY AND CATASTROPHIC BLUNDER WHICH PROVIDED PRETEXT ISRAELIS WERE WAITING FOR TO INTERVENE IN LEBANON AND STRIKE AT SYRIAN ARMY. IF SYRIA PLA-ISRAELI HOSTILITIES WERE TO CONTINUE FOR MORE THAN BRIEF PERIOD INVOLVING ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF SYRIAN/LEBANESE TERRITORY, RISE OF ARAB (ESPECIALLY SAUDI) PRESSURES AND EMOTIONS WOULD FORCE EGYPTIANS, WILLINGLY OR UNWILLINGLY, INTO CONSIDERING SOME KIND OF MILITARY RIPOSTE.

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6. POLITICAL OPTION. EGYPT'S POLITICAL OPTIONS IN EVENT OF ISRAELI INTERVENTION APPEAR EQUALLY LIMITED. A SEMBLANCE OF ARAB UNITY WOULD DOUBTLESS ARISE OVERNIGHT, BUT UNDERNEATH WOULD BE THE CALL OF THE RADICALS FOR ALL-OUT WAR. EGYPT AND OTHERS WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY LAUNCH AN IMMEDIATE CALL FOR UNSC CONSIDERATION OF THE PROBLEM SUPPORTED BY CAMPAIGN TO MOBILIZE WORLD OPINION AGAINST ISRAEL. AT THE SAME TIME, SADAT WOULD URGENTLY APPROACH US TO BRING ABOUT AN END TO HOSTILITIES AND IMMEDIATE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. ONLY IF THE US WERE UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO BRING A HALT TO ISRAELI "AGGRESSION," DO WE BELIEVE SADAT WOULD CONSIDER ACTIONS THAT WOULD CAUSE AN OPENBREAK WITH US. WHETHER SUCH US ACTIONS WERE TO TAKE PLACE THROUGH BILATERAL OR MULTILATERAL EFFORTS WOULD PROBABLY BE IMMATERIAL TO SADAT, AS LONG AS THEY WERE EFFECTIVE AND SPEEDY.

7. ECONOMIC OPTION. ONE OF THE EARLY ARAB REACTIONS--PARTICULARLY, IF US UNABLE MOVE PROMPTLY TO REVERSE SITUATION--WOULD BE TO CONSIDER USE OF THE OIL EMBARGO AS A PRESSURE AGAINST US AND THE WEST TO STOP ISRAELIS. WE DO NOT EXPECT THAT GOE WOULD INSTITUTE THIS PROPOSAL, BUT IF THE PRINCIPAL FINANCIAL BENEFACTORS, PARTICULARLY SAUDI ARABIA, WERE DETERMINED TO USE THE OIL WEAPON, EGYPT WOULD ACQUIESCE IN ACTION.

8. DOMESTIC REACTION. ALL EGYPTIANS CAN BE EXPECTED TO REACT STRONGLY TO ISRAELI INTERVENTION, SEEING IT ONLY AS ANOTHER IN SERIES OF "AGGRESSIONS" COMMITTED TO EXPAND ITS TERRITORY. EGYPTIAN PUBLIC, AND EVEN SOME ELEMENTS OF MILITARY (STILL FLUSHED WITH OCTOBER 73 "VICTORY") ARE NOT AWARE OF EXTENT OF EGYPT'S MILITARY LIMITATIONS AND ARE LIKELY TO CLAMOR FOR MILITARY ACTION. INTELLECTUALS AND "LEFTISTS," ALREADY CRITICAL OF SADAT'S RELIANCE ON US, WILL NO LONGER BE SO EASILY STIFLED BECAUSE THEY WILL THEN REPRESENT MUCH BROADER BASED OPINION. SADAT'S ABILITY TO WITHSTAND AND DIRECT PUBLIC OPINION WILL, OF COURSE, DEPEND ON POSITIONS

TAKEN BY SAUDI ARABIA AND PERHAPS FEW OTHER ARAB STATES, US,
AND OF COURSE INTERVENTION TAKES. POSSIBILITY OF MOB ACTION
AGAINST US INSTALLATIONS IN EGYPT CANNOT BE RULED OUT, PARTICULARLY
IF US STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS OPPOSING INTERVENTION ARE NOT PROMPT
AND EFFECTIVE. HOWEVER, GIVEN SADAT'S INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS
PEOPLE'S CHARACTER, WE BELIEVE THAT HE WOULD TAKE THOSE ACTIONS
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REQUIRED TO MINIMIZE POSSIBILITY OF ANY BREAKDOWN IN PUBLIC ORDER.

8. CONSEQUENCES FOR US INTERESTS. ISRAELI INTERVENTION IN
LEBANON HOWEVER JUSTIFIABLE IN ISRAELI (AND US) EYES, AND THE
RESULTANT ARAB REACTION WOULD DEAL A MAJOR BLOW TO HOPES FOR FURTHER
PROGRESS TOWARD A PEACEFUL ME SETTLEMENT IN THE FORESEEABLE
FUTURE. IN FACT, ONLY RAPID AND EFFECTIVE ACTION (BY THE US OR
OTHERS) TO LIMIT CONSEQUENCES OF INTERVENTION COULD PRESERVE
THE GAINS ALREADY ACHIEVED IN SINAI. IF THE US IS UNABLE TO DELIVER
AND ARAB OPINION TURNS VIOLENTLY ANTI-AMERICAN, SADAT MAY ALSO
BE FORCED AGAINST HIS WILL TO RECONSIDER HIS HEAVY RELIANCE
ON US FOR ACHIEVEMENT OF HIS BROADER GOALS.

9. IN SUMMARY, IT IS EMBASSY CONSIDERED VIEW, THAT DIRECT
ISRAELI INTERVENTION IN LEBANON OR SYRIA, HOWEVER JUSTIFIED, WILL
SIGNIFICANTLY SET BACK PROSPECTS OF FURTHER PROGRESS TOWARD ME
PEACE SETTLEMENT FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE; AND THAT THE PEACE

KEEPING FOR THE THREE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENTS AND THE
"SPECIAL" US-EGYPTIAN RELATIONSHIP COULD ONLY BE PRESERVED BY
IMMEDIATE AND EFFECTIVE US ACTION TO END ISRAELI INTERVENTION.
ALTHOUGH SADAT MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO WASH HIS HANDS
OF MASHREK AND THREATEN TO PROCEED WITH SEPARATE
PEACE, WE BELIEVE HIS OWN CONVICTIONS AND ARAB AND EGYPTIAN
PUBLIC PRESSURES ARE LIKELY TO BE TOO STRONG TO MAKE THIS
REALISTIC PROSPECT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ARMISTICE, INTERVENTION, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976CAIRO01005
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760029-0404
From: CAIRO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760122/aaaaatje.tel
Line Count: 263
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06 MAY 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <01 SEP 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: POSSIBLE EGYPTIAN REACTIONS IF ISRAEL INTERVENES IN LEBANON
TAGS: PFOR, MOPS, EG, XF, IS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006